

**Title:** English As A Lingua Franca In Higher Education In Malaysia

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**ABSTRACT:**

This paper examines the role of English in higher education in Malaysia within the context of Southeast Asia, ASEAN, and the global challenges the country faces. It surveys the uses, functions of and demand for English in Malaysia and the region. The practices and needs of higher education institutions are contextualized within the progression from secondary education upwards and the history of educational policies. This paper discusses English needs of higher education as set inside multilingual contexts where English functions as the default language. The nature of English in Malaysia and across Southeast Asia is highly diverse and variable and speakers may use stable and creative localized forms such as Malaysian, Singaporean and Philippine English. The tension between these national or regional varieties and the desired command of English are addressed. It is proposed that English as a lingua franca may be the best option for higher education institutions although one will still need to restrict it to semi-formal spoken contexts and adopt a form of international English for writing, especially academic writing. Whatever target variety is thought to be the most adequate, English cannot be dissociated from culture and pragmatic norms. Teaching and learning therefore require an openness to and acceptance of diversity way beyond immediate comprehension.

**Keywords:** ELF; multilingualism; higher education; ASEAN; Malaysia

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